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Kant follows Christian tradition by asserting that humanity is sinful by nature, that our sinful nature burdens us with an infinite debt to God, and that it is possible for us to undergo a moral transformation that liberates us from sin and from its debt. Most of the secondary literature has focused on either Kant's account of sin or our liberation from it. Far less attention has been paid to the debt in particular. The purpose of this paper is to explore the nature of this debt, why Kant regards it as infinite, and what becomes of it for those who undergo a moral transformation.

Introduction

According to the Anselmian doctrine of vicarious atonement, Christ's death serves as repayment for our debt of sin.[1] Since this debt is infinite, we could not have discharged it on our own, and so God provided his Son, whose value is infinite, to die so that we may be redeemed. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant follows this doctrine—up to a point. In his own way, he accepts original sin and also agrees that due to it, we carry an infinite debt. He also recognizes that we can be freed from sin and from its debt. However, he quite explicitly rejects key aspects of the doctrine of vicarious atonement, including the possibility that this debt can be paid by anyone other than the person who originally incurred it. This debt, Kant writes, "cannot be erased by somebody else. For it is not a *transmissible* liability . . . but the *most personal* of all liabilities, namely a debt of sins which only the culprit, not the innocent, can bear" (6:72).[2]

The purpose of this paper is to explore how, if not from vicarious atonement, Kant thinks that we can be freed from the debt of sin. In section

[1]The locus classicus for Anselm's doctrine is *Cur Deus Homo*, especially Book II, chapters 6–18. Though there are many substitutionary theories of atonement, Anselm is usually viewed as the first to articulate a satisfaction theory. As will be seen, Kant's discussion of atonement is framed both generally along Anselmian-satisfaction lines, and also follows the Anselmian account in more specific ways, such as their shared representation of sin as a debt to God and the crucifixion as offering "surplus merit" for its repayment. Analyses of Kant's views on atonement are elsewhere similarly framed in relation to Anselm, most notably in Philip Quinn's work on the topic, which shall be discussed later in this paper.

[2]Citations to Kant will be to the Akademie Ausgabe by volume and page, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* where citations will use the standard A/B edition pagination. English quotations will be, unless otherwise indicated, from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, 1992–).

one, I shall briefly review some preliminary issues including Kant's understanding of original sin, why sin carries a debt to God, and why this debt is infinite. In section two, I will discuss *Religion*'s account of moral transformation. These sections are intended to be fairly mainstream expositions of Kant's views and are offered primarily for the benefit of non-specialists rather than being new or heterodox accounts of radical evil or moral transformation. In section three, I will move into more controversial territory and will begin to consider Kant's references to vicarious atonement as they relate to the general hermeneutical problem of how to interpret *Religion*'s Christological language. Then, in section four, I will focus on one of the most prevalent interpretations of Kant's position regarding the fate of this debt, one that can be found in the writings of Gordon Michalson, Philip Quinn, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. It is in this section, in particular, that this paper's main purpose is realized. I will discuss some difficulties arising from their view and then present my alternative interpretation of what *Religion* has to say about the fate of our debt of sin. Lastly, in section five, I will consider one residual role that remains for vicarious atonement in *Religion*.

I. The Debt of Sin

According to Kant, to honor God is to abide by morality. Though most religions contain "statutory legislation," i.e., rules of piety which are separate from morality, Kant holds that such legislation "does not bind all human beings universally" (6:105) and "cannot be recognized as duty" (6:105). Instead, "the service of God consists simply and solely in *following his will* and observing his holy laws and commandments. *Thus morality and religion stand in the closest combination*" (28:1102). "[T]he true veneration that he desires" is nothing other than "good life conduct" (6:105) and when we choose to act on self-interest (when in conflict with morality), we dishonor God.[3]

Such choices are also identified with the idea of sin; and Kant further follows Christian tradition by explaining our individual immoral deeds in relation to an underlying innate corruption shared by all humanity—i.e., original sin (6:31). He calls this the propensity to evil,[4] and explains it in

[3]See also 5:129 and 6:72. For a detailed discussion of Kant's representation of morality as divine command, see Patrick Kain, "Interpreting Kant's Theory of Divine Commands," *Kantian Review* 9 (2005), 128–149.

[4]Both moral goodness and moral evil can be understood (at least in part) without reference to religious concepts. Yet some of Kant's articulations of the Highest Good do present his moral concepts as dependent upon religion. One of the most notorious is: "If, therefore, the highest good is impossible in accordance with practical rules, then the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic, directed to empty imaginary ends and must therefore itself be false" (5:114). Based upon this passage, it seems that our fundamental moral concepts (good, evil, right, wrong) at least justificatorially (and perhaps semantically) depend upon the Highest Good and its Postulates. This is not always explicit in Kant's moral writings, nor should we necessarily force it upon all of them given his changing views on the role of the Highest Good through the Critical Period.

Nevertheless, within *Religion*, Kant explicitly presents evil [*Böse*] as a violation of God's

terms of a choice to let self-interest dominate one's practical disposition.[5] Kant represents this choice as a transgression of infinite proportion that burdens us with an infinite debt to God.

He certainly is not unique in holding that we bear such a debt, though his explanation for why it is infinite differs from that of others. Anselm, for instance, explains it in terms of our violation of God's infinite degree of honor.[6] Aquinas, similarly, explains it as a turning away from what is of infinite value.[7] But Kant's explanation is "not so much because of the *infinity* of the highest lawgiver whose authority is thereby offended" (6:72). Rather, he believes that our debt is infinite because we, in a certain sense, will infinite wrongdoing.

He writes: "moral evil . . . brings with it an *infinity* of violations of the law, and hence an *infinity* of guilt . . . because the evil is in the *disposition* and the maxims in general" (6:72). "Infinity" here cannot be taken extensionally, that is, cannot be taken to mean that we actually commit an infinite number of wrongs; nor can it be taken to mean that we positively will to commit an infinity of immoral deeds. Assuming we do not have the opportunity to perform an infinite number of actions, the first option is ruled out;[8] and since Kant also rejects the possibility of a human diabolical will, i.e., a will whose principle is to act contrary to morality, so is the second (see 6:35).

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will. For example: "Evil begins, according to the Scriptures, not from a fundamental propensity to it, for otherwise its beginning would not result from freedom, but from *sin* (by which is understood the transgression of the moral law as *divine command*)" (6:41–42); "moral evil (transgression of the moral law, called sin when the law is taken *as divine command*)" (6:72). See also 6:43, 6:74, 6:146n.

[5]There is ample disagreement about the details of this fundamental choice of our *Gesinnung*, including its relationship to the propensity to evil, its status as innate, and its application to the entire species. This is not, however, the place to delve into these issues, for there is no short and straightforward way to handle them. Some of the more influential discussions of these topics appear in John Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion," in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, ed. Theodore M. Green and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), lxxix–cxxxvii; Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1970); Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and most recently, Pablo Muchnik, *Kant's Theory of Evil* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).

[6]See *Cur Deus Homo* I.11–15, and 21. In chapter 11, our debt of sin is described in terms of "not rendering to God his due" and as a "debt of honor." It is similarly described in chapters 13–15. Thus commentators often interpret Anselm's account of the debt as a violation of the honor due to God. Chapter 21 as well as chapter 6 of Book II characterizes the magnitude of the debt.

[7]*Summa Theologica* I.II. q87. a4.

[8]In this life, surely we cannot. Once we add Kant's postulate of immortality, then it could be that we can at least *approach* an infinity of immoral deeds. Though the postulate of immortality also appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant there focuses on its relevance for the distribution of happiness in accordance with moral worth. But in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant uses this postulate to explain how this distribution can be actualized as well as to make possible an endless progress of moral development, such that we can continue to strive to become worthy of maximal happiness (see 5:122). We may imagine, then, that some may progress more slowly than others by perpetually rejecting the moral law. In his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, Kant suggests something like this: "if he has acted contrary to the eternal and necessary laws of morality [in this life], then he must fear that there too his moral corruption will continue and increase" (28:1085).

To grasp how an evil disposition "brings with it an *infinity* of violations of the law and hence an *infinity* of guilt," let me make use of the legal concept of constructive intent. It is applied to the mental state of an agent who elects to do something in violation of criminal law or civil responsibility, though not out of malice, but with a wanton disregard for the harms that a reasonable person would associate with the chosen conduct. It is akin to negligence, but is raised from simple omission because the person is considered culpable for overlooking or ignoring quite obvious factors salient to public safety, fiduciary responsibility, etc.

For example, imagine someone who is eager to get to his destination and decides to speed along icy roads in an area where many pedestrians are crossing. He does not directly will them harm, but has disregarded the proper standards of conduct for the situation, standards that a reasonable person would recognize as important to public safety. If the driver loses control of his vehicle and kills a pedestrian, he can, by way of constructive intent, be charged with *voluntary* manslaughter. In effect, his actions indicate a wanton disregard for the pedestrians and so assigned to him is a willingness to harm them in the fulfillment of his goal.

When we choose to prioritize self-interest over morality, we may not be choosing any specific act of immorality, nor are we positively choosing immorality for the sake of immorality, but we are choosing to take down a barrier to our conduct which carries with it a willingness to commit immoral acts when called for out of self-interest. Thus, as Kant puts it, we are implicitly (i.e., through constructive intent) condoning an unlimited neglect of morality, an "infinity of violations of the law."[9]

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[9]Kant takes it for granted that sin [*Sünde*] carries a debt to God. He never explicitly argues for it but rather assumes that through sin, we incur a debt that needs to be repaid. To address a concern raised by an anonymous reviewer, I am not making this claim about evil when viewed outside of the context of religion. Rather, my point concerns sin (most directly) and only evil when rendered, as it is in *Religion*, as "the transgression of the moral law as *divine command*" (6:72).

Although we can glean from Kant an argument as to why the debt of sin is infinite, there is little said about why sin involves debt *simpliciter*. My suspicion is that he regarded their relationship as analytic and is merely following a long-standing convention. A general account of the relationship between moral and religious concepts can be found in Patrick Kain's "Interpreting Kant's Theory of Divine Commands," cited earlier. But as for why he sees sin as involving a debt, since it appears that he regards their relationship as analytic (i.e., the concept of sin involves the concept of debt), I think a philological explanation is most appropriate.

The assumption that sin carries a debt to God is well embedded in the Christian tradition as well as Second-Temple Period Judaism. Linguists trace the connection between debt and sin to Aramaic. It was also routinely used in Mishnaic Hebrew, presumably as a consequence of the Assyrian invasion of Israel. However, sin is not characterized in terms of debt to God in the Old Testament. Rather, it is usually represented in terms of a weight or burden. In the New Testament, the connection is also not prevalent. But the Gospel of Matthew provides a significant exception, as it uses the Greek word for debt when discussing sin. Readers of the time would have found this idiosyncratic since the term for debt in Koine Greek was not typically used in this way. Yet this Gospel was probably the main catalyst for what became the dominant view. See Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 15–39.

II. The Change of Heart

Following the logic of *ought implies can*, Kant claims that we must be capable of transforming our moral character (e.g., 6:45). But he appears to be conflicted as to whether this transformation is something we can achieve on our own or whether we require divine assistance. In the first part of *Religion*, Kant wonders whether "some supernatural cooperation is also needed" (6:44).[10] However, he later writes that "even to accept it as idea for a purely practical intent is very risky and hard to reconcile with reason" and a paragraph later "[it is] salutary to keep ourselves at a respectful distance from it" (6:191). If somehow there is such aid, Kant is emphatic that we can never know what form it takes.[11] To think otherwise is the presumption of enthusiasts, is "a kind of madness" and a "self-deception detrimental to religion" (6:174).

Notwithstanding the possibility of some supernatural assistance, we must ultimately be responsible for our moral transformation. This is required by Kant's appeal to the logic of *ought implies can* as well as to the "rational hope" of reward that, according to his doctrine of the Highest Good, is supposed to follow from our becoming "well-pleasing to God."[12] We must make an "an earnest endeavor to improve [our] . . . moral nature in all possible ways" (6:192) and even if there is some supernatural assistance, "the human being must make himself antecedently worthy of receiving it; and he must accept this help" (6:44). That is, even if there is supernatural assistance along the way, the first step is up to us.[13]

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[10]An anonymous reviewer has suggested that the Wood/di Giovanni translation of this passage ignores its hypothetical or conjectural nature. Thus, I have preceded the quote with "Kant wonders whether."

[11]That is, we cannot possibly have the epistemic grounds to either opine or know whether there is such assistance. In *Religion*, see for instance 6:53 and 6:191. See also A775/B803, 8:396n, 20:299, 24:743. However, at 6:87, Kant does mention one "negative criterion" for evaluating putative miracles and revelations: they must not violate the moral law. See also Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance," *The Journal of Religion* 90 (2010), 530–553. He emphasizes the ethical dangers surrounding the belief in grace and focuses on the practical argument for keeping grace as a hope rather than an assertoric commitment.

[12]See for example: A805/B833–A819/B847. The language of "rational hope," though, becomes less pronounced after the *Critique of Pure Reason.* This may be because of the motivational role that this hope has in the First *Critique*, which then gets supplanted by Kant's better known account of moral motivation in the *Groundwork*. His commitment to the doctrine of the Highest Good nevertheless remains. For example, in the Second *Critique*, Kant states that without the possibility of the Highest Good, the moral law "must be fantastic, directed to empty imaginary ends, and consequently inherently false" (5:114). For a more detailed discussion of how the First *Critique*'s account of moral motivation differs from later accounts, see my introduction to *Immanuel Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals in Focus* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[13]See also 6:52 and 6:171–172. This may sound alarmingly Pelagian to some readers. In "Kant's History of Ethics" (*Studies in the History of Ethics* 1:1 [2005]), Allen Wood briefly discusses the Augustinian-Pelagian tensions in Kant's thought and interprets him to be agnostic on the question of whether supernatural assistance is necessary. Kant writes, for instance, "How it is possible that a naturally evil human being should make himself into a good human being surpasses every concept of ours [*das übersteigt alle unsere Begriffe*]" (6:44) and Wood notes that our inability to conceptualize how this transformation occurs can move us towards an Augustinian position. That is, since we cannot fathom *how* we can

This first step, however, is just as difficult to comprehend as our descent into sin while fully aware of the moral law. Both pertain to our decision about which of the most fundamental of practical principles to adopt. When we fall into sin, we choose self-interest despite what is supposed to be the apodictic certainty of morality's bindingness upon us (5:47). And when in the state of sin, while our will is still governed by self-interest, we somehow choose to restore morality to its rightful place. For Kant, this transformation is inexplicable: "How it is possible that a naturally evil human being should make himself into a good human being surpasses every concept of ours" (6:45). Those who undergo a moral transformation initiate that transformation while self-interest still serves as their ultimate criterion. Thus Kant's problem: how could one from self-interest choose to abandon self-interest? We may also put this in terms of a "catch-22": it takes a commitment to morality to want to commit to it, so while in the state of sin we presumably would never will to leave it.[14]

I am not going to here attempt to fully unravel the perplexities of Kant's account of moral transformation. But there are glimmerings of an account that is less mysterious. Let us assume that while in a state of sin, we do what we can to mask the authority of the moral law. Nevertheless, Kant acknowledges that "in spite of that fall, the command that we *ought* to become better human beings still resounds unabated in our souls" (6:45). Out of our consciousness of the moral law, we experience, in the language of the Second *Critique*, feelings of humility and respect for the law.[15] Such

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achieve this transformation on our own, we defer to a supernatural account of it. However, Wood also quite rightly notes that on practical grounds, given our commitment to *ought implies can*, we must, despite our inability to grasp how we can transform on our own, commit to its possibility. So, from the practical point of view, Kant presents a Pelagian (or Semipelagian) account. But given his rejection of supersensible knowledge, we cannot take one view or the other as dogma. See also Stephen Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 288–289. Palmquist rebuts the charge of Pelagianism in quite a different way, namely, by treating our cognition of the moral "prototype" discussed towards the beginning of Part Two of *Religion* as a moment of divine assistance that precedes our efforts at transformation. I am, however, unsure whether we should theologize this point. The prototype, as I read it, is the rational Ideal of *human* moral perfection and I do not see why this Ideal is not one crafted by us through the synthesis of our cognition of the moral law and of our understanding of humanity as finite and sensibly affected agents. However, if we regard this construction as somehow coming from God, it seems to me that we are forced to view the Fact of Reason as also divinely inspired. For a view quite different from Palmquist's, see Robert Adams's introduction to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). He briefly discusses Kant's views on grace and holds that Kant rejects Augustinian prevenient grace (see ibid., xxi). For a comparison of Kant and Luther on the issue, see Hans-Martin Rieger, "Der Zugang zur menschlichen Selbstverkehrung bei Kant und bei Luther," *Theologie und Philosophie* 82 (2007), 65–96.

[14]It is no surprise that on the tail of this problem, Kant turns to the issue of grace. But as briefly discussed, we must still make ourselves worthy to receive it—which presumably means that we, on our own, choose to want to prioritize morality over self-interest. To want such a change, though, indicates that the change has come about. Out of self-interest, presumably, we would never want this.

[15]Kant comments that despite our propensity to evil, there remains within us "a germ of goodness left in its entire purity" (6:45). For further discussion of the role of moral feel-

feelings deprive "self-love of its influence and self-conceit of its illusion, and thereby the hindrance to pure practical reason is lessened and the representation of the superiority of its objective law to the impulses of sensibility is produced" (5:75–76).

Thus, we have moments which assail "the activity of the subject so far as inclinations are his determining grounds and hence upon the opinion of his personal worth" (5:78). These moments, let us assume, are usually squashed, joked away, or otherwise interpreted through the distorting lens of sin. Nevertheless, even while in this state, there are moments, however brief, where we cannot find a new lie or when the ones we have been using no longer work, moments where those worldly things that we care about are destroyed by our own excesses, or moments where we just cannot sustain the psychological dissonance which results from a life riddled with self-deception.

Though we may flee from such moments, through drink, television, shopping, or another of the countless distractions constantly enticing us, a change of heart, though grievously impeded, is still possible. The decisive moment of this change may still involve the "catch-22" discussed above, for we still have the problem of how one who has given priority to self-interest can choose to overthrow it. But when it happens, we undergo a transformation that is described by Kant as a "*revolution* . . . a rebirth, as it were a new creation" (6:47). In fact, the qualitative change in the *Gesinnung* is so radical, that he characterizes the post-transformation self as "*morally* another being" (6:74) and speaks of the self before and after the transformation as two distinct individuals, the "old man" and "new man," respectively.[16] This distinction is, as we shall soon see, central to Kant's account of the expiation of our debt of sin. But before we turn to it, let us examine his allusions to the doctrine of vicarious atonement and the related interpretative controversy.

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ing in our moral transformation, see Joshua Schulz, "Grace and the New Man: Conscious Humiliation and the Revolution of Disposition in Kant's *Religion*," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81:3 (2007), 439–446. See also footnote 34 below.

[16]The "old man"/"new man" is a Pauline distinction. See for example, Colossians 3:9–11. What Kant's criteria are for one becoming "morally another being" is certainly an interesting problem. It is one deserving of exploration, but would take us too far astray. Some of the relevant factors would have to do with the First Analogy and the problems of application to a "soul," as discussed in the Paralogisms. Also of significance is the role of the will in constituting the *Gesinnung* in a manner which some see as analogous to the unity of apperception of the Transcendental Deduction: an "I take" or "I will" vs. the "I think." This latter point has been discussed by Henry Allison in *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 40–41 and Pablo Muchnik in *Kant's Theory of Evil*, 102–109. The analogy to the "I think" needs further development in the literature, and one stumbling block for the "I will" is how to apply it to our moral transformation. As the unity of apperception is established by the unity of judgment (i.e., it must be the same consciousness which thinks the parts of the judgment for there to be a judgment over the parts), we would expect the same (following the analogy) for the *Gesinnung*. However, given the "catch-22" we have discussed, it appears that there can be no practical judgment which crosses the divide between the old and new self—so there is a breach in continuity of self. This breach may be helpful for Kant's claim of a new creation. But it does not fill our need to make rational sense of this change.

III. Christian Symbolism in Religion

Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason contains a number of passages which strongly suggest that Kant did fully subscribe to the Anselmian doctrine of vicarious atonement. For instance, he writes, "this very Son of God—bears as *vicarious substitute* the debt of sin for him" (6:74) and in what seems to be a discussion of the historical event of the crucifixion, Kant states that Christ "opened the doors of freedom to all who, like him, choose to die to everything that holds them fettered to earthly life to the detriment of morality" (6:82).

Nevertheless, there are numerous passages that conflict with this impression—and so, of course, there is considerable disagreement about the extent to which Kant follows Christian orthodoxy. Philip Quinn, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Allen Wood are among those who read Kant as deviating from many core Christian doctrines, including the divinity of Jesus and the soteriological relevance of his death.[17] Even though from the Practical Postulates it is clear that Kant endorses a moral belief in God and in the afterlife, he regards Christianity and other religious traditions as mere vehicles for a "pure rational faith."[18] Ecclesiastical traditions help carry rational religion through history, but Kant looks forward to a time when we can dispense with the claims of revelations, miracles, and the "mystical" trappings of Christianity and other religions: "The leading-string of holy tradition, with its appendages, its statutes and observances, which in its time did good service, become bit by bit dispensable" (6:121).

Others, however, oppose the de-christianizing interpretations of Kant. One of the more frequently cited defenses of Kant's Christian credentials is Jacqueline Mariña's "Kant on Grace: A Reply to His Critics."[19] Although her reading is more moderate in some other respects, Mariña holds that

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[17]See for example Philip Quinn, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," *Faith and Philosophy* 3:4 (1986), 440–462; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. Philip Rossi and Michael Wreen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 40–53; Allen Wood, "Kant's Deism" in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 1–21, and also in his earlier work, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

[18]*Reiner Vernunftglaube* is used by Kant in his 1786 essay, "What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?," the *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Religion*, and elsewhere to refer to the universally communicable features of religion once claims of miracles, revelation, etc. are stripped away. See 5:126, 5:146, 6:104, 6:154–155, 8:141–142, etc. It is contrasted against *historischer Glaube, Geschichtsglaube*, and *Kirchenglaube*. See my "The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest Good, the Practical Postulates, and the Fact of Reason," *Kant-Studien* 102:3 (2011), 290-315.

[19]Jacqueline Mariña, "Kant on Grace: A Reply to his Critics," *Religious Studies* 33 (1997), 379–400. See also Stephen Palmquist's *Kant's Critical Religion*. More recently, Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs in *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008) have offered a survey of the major figures and arguments supporting and opposing Kant's Christian commitments. The position of Firestone and Jacobs seems to me to strive for a middle-ground. For instance, they do not hold that Kant believed that the historical Jesus was actually the Son of God, but do claim that Kant's references to the Son of God, many of which are from the opening chapters of the Gospel of John, are not merely symbolic but refer to an existing non-corporeal spiritual being.

Kant's *Religion* explicitly affirms "that the historical moment of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ, opens the portals of freedom."[20] In support of this claim, she quotes at length from the passage about the "doors of freedom," mentioned briefly above. She rejects that it is about "merely the archetype of goodness lying in our reason"[21] and instead asserts that Kant regards the historical moment of the crucifixion as necessary for our salvation.[22]

Although Mariña may have a well-considered soteriology, perhaps influenced by Kant's writings, her more literal reading of *Religion* cannot be sustained, particularly her treatment of the "doors of freedom" passage. There are various occasions in *Religion* where Kant makes heavy use of Christian imagery. For example, Part Two of *Religion* begins with a section entitled "The Personified Idea of The Good Principle" (6:60) and contains a series of quotations, mostly from the Gospel of John. The quotations speak of the Son of God who "is in him [God] from all eternity" and through whom "we hope 'to become children of God'" (6:61). The next section, though, entitled "The Objective Reality of This Idea" seems to distance itself from gospel imagery, indicating that the previous section's "*prototype* [that] has *come down* to us from heaven" (6:61) is "nowhere to be sought except in our reason" (6:63) and we have "no cause to assume in him [the historical Jesus] anything except a naturally begotten human being" (6:63). Even more radically, Kant then presents an argument *against* the acceptance of Jesus's divinity. In brief, the argument is that his moral example, suffering and death would lose its significance if he were more than human: "the elevation of such a Holy One above every frailty of human nature would rather, from all that we can see, stand in the way" (6:64).

This is a pattern that is repeated in *Religion* but has been broadly overlooked in the secondary literature.[23] Kant first delves into Christian imagery, sometimes for as much as a paragraph or two, but then switches gears and explains what imagery remains significant and what should be put aside. Among the clearest examples of this pattern is Mariña's "doors of freedom" passage and what follows. Though she sees it as disclosing Kant's actual commitment to the soteriological significance of the crucifixion, once finished with the elaborate metaphors, he describes what he has just written as a "mystical cover" and a "vivid mode of representing

[20]Mariña, "Kant on Grace," 394.

[21]Ibid.," 394–395.

[22]For instance, she later writes: "Such an example enforces the incentive of the moral disposition in us by making it *objective* for us," ibid," 398.

[23]One recent study of Kant's use of Christian symbols in *Religion* is Andrew Chignell, "The Devil, the Virgin, and the Envoy: Symbols of Moral Struggle in *Religion*, Part Two, Section Two," in Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Bloßen Vernunft*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 111–129. Chignell too recognizes that Kant appears to be quite heterodox regarding the nature and soteriological significance of Christ: "Notably absent in this section are allusions to models on which Christ satisfies a sort of debt owed to God by sinful humans . . . he [Kant] typically downplays them as misleading" (ibid., 116).

things . . . *suited to the common people*" (6:83). He then writes "[i]ts meaning is that there is absolutely no salvation for human beings except in the innermost adoption of genuine moral principles in their disposition" (6:83).[24]

Like many other religions, Christianity includes a sacred history, miraculous and revelatory events that it binds together, and provides a story about humanity's relationship with God. This story, of course, includes the life and death of Jesus, and how this story is interpreted distinguishes Christianity from other religions. But consider what Kant has to say about a religion that is so fundamentally shaped by its ties to putative miraculous and revelatory events: "a church sacrifices the most important mark of its truth, namely the legitimate claim to universality, whenever it bases itself upon a faith of revelation, which as historical faith . . . is incapable of a transmission that commands conviction universally" (6:109).

We should expect from the author of the *Critique of Pure Reason* such a position. We lack the epistemic grounds to verify (or falsify) these sorts of claims. Those who assert that their affirmation is necessary for salvation are committed to a "dangerous religious delusion" (6:171); and institutions that take them as tenets of faith compromise their own legitimacy: "The only faith that can found a universal church is *pure religious faith*, for it is a plain rational faith which can be convincingly communicated to everyone, whereas a historical faith, merely based on facts, can extend its influence no further than the tidings relevant to a judgment on its credibility can reach." (6:103).

In short, Kant's aim in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* is not merely to show what of religion fits within reason, but rather (a) to show that "soul saving faith"[25] is rational; and (b) to encourage the development of a universal church whose essential tenets go no farther than those which are already nascent in our rationality. For stylistic and perhaps political purposes,[26] he sometimes uses language that suggests

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[24]One of the main points of contention between Mariña and Quinn is their respective interpretations of what is known as The Remarkable Antinomy. Most readers should recognize that much of what I have said regarding Part Two of *Religion* applies as well to the Remarkable Antinomy, found in Part Three. However, as the antinomy concerns primarily moral transformation and only indirectly the debt of sin, I have bypassed any direct discussion of it. In general, I am in agreement with Quinn that Kant dissolves the antinomy by holding that "the true object of saving faith is the archetype [the rational concept of the Ideal human] rather than some historical person" (Philip Quinn, "Saving Faith From Kant's Remarkable Antinomy," *Faith and Philosophy* 7:4 [1990], 428). Mariña, however, believes that Quinn does not fully understand the antinomy and thus "loses sight of the upshot of Kant's argument" ("Kant on Grace: A Reply to his Critics," 391). She does not think that Kant reduces the importance of the historical Jesus to merely a representation of a rational concept. Rather, she sees the relationship between the historical and the rational as epistemic. That is, we use the rational ideal to interpret the historical (ibid., 393). But, she believes Kant claims that an actual "historical intervention" by God is necessary for our salvation. This is the historical moment of the crucifixion which provides "a merit not one's own [and] must precede every effort to good works" (ibid., 393). Much of this is based upon how she interprets the "doors of freedom" passage, an interpretation we have examined above.

[25]"*Seelenbessernder Glaube*." See for example, 6:124 and 6:129.

[26]In 1788, J. C. Wöllner was appointed as Minister of Education and Religious Affairs. Wöllner swiftly promulgated an edict to curtail Enlightenment encroachments on Christian Orthodoxy. In 1792, the first part of *Religion* was sent to the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* for

a more orthodox position. But for Kant, true religion is solely within the boundaries of reason. Thus, any religion claiming that its fundamental principles necessarily depend upon revelation or faith in historical events "sacrifices the most important mark of its truth, namely the legitimate claim to universality" (6:109).

It does not follow from this that long-used symbols, ecclesiastical statutes, or rituals directly violate pure rational faith. They can still be of instrumental value, due to our "natural need" to give "even the highest concepts and grounds of reason something that *the senses can hold on to*" (6:109). They can help shape the culture of a religious community and bring its members into closer fellowship. Nevertheless, Kant emphasizes the importance of seeing them as "internally contingent" (6:105) vehicles for pure rational faith, as opposed to themselves being objects of faith, required by God, or relevant to how He judges us.

IV. The Expiation of the Debt of Sin

Despite his various excursions into Christian imagery, I have argued that it would be a mistake to take their use as indicative of traditional Christian commitments—particularly the divinity of Jesus and the significance of his death. Moreover, as briefly discussed in the introduction, this option is also rejected by Kant. The debt of sin is "not a *transmissible* liability" (6:72). It "cannot be erased by somebody else" (6:72) for it is "the *most personal* of all liabilities." It is not like a financial debt "where it is all the same to the creditor whether the debtor himself pays up, or somebody else for him" (6:72). Nevertheless, Kant also states that we can be freed from this debt, and many interpreters, including Gordon Michalson, Philip Quinn, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, have looked to Kant's comments on divine grace in order to explain how.[27]

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publication. It made it through Berlin's censor, but the second part did not. Kant then sent the manuscript as a whole to the philosophy faculty at Königsberg in order to have them affirm that it is a philosophical rather than theological text. Having succeeded in this step, he then submitted it to the faculty of philosophy at Jena. Though he succeeded in getting *Religion* published, he was formally prohibited from any further publication on religious matters. Kant abided by this edict until the death of Frederick William II and the abrogation of Wöllner's edict in 1797. See Wilhelm Dilthey, "Der Streit Kants mit der Zensur über das Recht freier Religionsforschung," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 3 (1890), 418–450. Reprinted in Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 4:285–309.

[27]Allen Wood as well could be added to this list based upon the following: "Man justifies *himself* insofar as he does everything in his power to become good; but God, for the sake of man's disposition to holiness, forgives him the evil which is not in his power to undo" (*Kant's Moral Religion*, 242). But I do not include him for two reasons. First, he does not clearly separate the debt of sin from the prescription to attain (or pursue) moral perfection. That is, he has not clearly separated justifying from sanctifying grace (see notes 36 and 37). Second, he suggests that forgiveness may not even be necessary if we are not morally required to achieve moral perfection. He points out that our duty to moral perfection may be "wide" or imperfect and consequently, what is required of us is the effort, not the success (*Kant's Moral Religion*, 246). I agree with Wood's claim that the duty to moral perfection is imperfect. It is well supported by the *Metaphysics of Morals* (see 6:386–387). However, I think Wood here conflates Kant's account of God's judgment in the Second *Critique* with what is

Michalson, for instance, has suggested that God is willing to "treat our moral progress as a kind of promissory note."[28] We must still strive as best we can towards a change of heart, but in addition to our striving, there is a "divine 'supplement'" that takes care of the rest. Quinn and Wolterstorff have likewise interpreted Kant to be suggesting that we must "take the initiative" but then God forgives our inevitable falling "short of compliance with the moral law's demand for perfect obedience."[29]

Most of those who have interpreted Kant in this way also use it to criticize him. Wolterstorff, for example, attributes to Kant the claim that God forgives our debt of sin, but then objects that: "such wiping out, if it were possible, would, in its indiscriminateness, raise a serious issue [with Kant's conception] of justice."[30] Similarly, Quinn objects that for Kant "righteousness is something we must earn by our own efforts to

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in *Religion*. With the latter's introduction of the *Gesinnung* choice, Kant shifts his account of what God judges from our striving for moral perfection to the order of incentives in our *Gesinnung*. The latter, I do not think, can be construed as an imperfect duty for reasons which include that it does not come in degrees: as Kant presents radical evil in the first part of *Religion*, we have only the binary option of having as our grounding maxim one which prioritizes self-interest over morality or morality over self-interest. See also footnote 30 below.

[28]Gordon Michalson, "Moral Regeneration and Divine Aid in Kant," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989), 268. Some of Michalson's comments suggest that the divine supplement is merely that God sees us as a "completed whole." Though Quinn and Wolterstorff also take note of the distinction between our perspective and that of God's, Michalson seems to take the latter as God's act of grace. But if so, it is not clear why this helps our cause. As a "completed whole," have we repaid our debt of sin or, as Quinn and Wolterstorff suggest, is there still a forgiveness for our falling short? Unfortunately, I do not find Michalson clear on this issue. Nevertheless, there is—as I shall discuss below—something important to be taken from the distinction between our perspective and God's. See also Gordon Michalson, *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 107–124.

[29]Quinn, "Saving Faith from Kant's Remarkable Antinomy," 425. See also Quinn, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," 455; and Wolterstorff, "Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion," 44–45. Kant actually offers two reasons why we inevitably fall short. One is, obviously, that the debt is infinite. The other actually parallels a point made by Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* (I.20). Just as Anselm states, so we find in Kant the position that since we are already obligated to do all we can morally, there is no "surplus" available from our moral obedience to be used to repay the debt. See 6:72.

[30]Wolterstorff, "Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion," 51. Kant writes, for example: "a *generous judge* in one and the same person is a contradiction" (6:147n). See also John Silber's "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion," cxxxi–iii. He too holds that justice and forgiveness are incompatible and believes it to be a serious mistake on Kant's part to introduce divine forgiveness. God, according to Silber, would be violating the moral law if he forgave the guilty (ibid., cxxxi). In *Kant's Moral Religion*, Wood challenges Silber, first by asserting that Silber has incorrectly assumed that forgiveness entails a denial of responsibility; second, by arguing that God is morally justified in forgiving us if we become worthy of it through our striving towards moral perfection. In addition to the objection that I develop in this section, I also think (as mentioned in footnote 27 above) that in *Kant's Moral Religion*, Wood conflates Kant's views in the Second *Critique* and in *Religion*. The argument for immortality in the former (5:122–123) builds from the claim that we must strive towards moral perfection in order to become worthy of happiness. However, in *Religion*, with the introduction of the *Gesinnung* and where "disposition takes the place of deed," God's judgment is rather based upon whether we have had a change of heart as opposed to a perfection of our governance of our inclinations (i.e., moral strength or virtue).

obey the moral law,"[31] and so, whether through Christ's death or through some other form of divine aid, "it would not justify us in God's sight; only elevating ourselves to the ideal of complete moral perfection could."[32]

Advocates of this "Divine Supplement" interpretation are quite right that the inclusion of divine forgiveness into Kant's soteriology would conflict with his views on justice and moral worth. To elaborate, we can further connect this conflict with Kant's doctrine of the Highest Good, which is, arguably, the foundation for his entire positive philosophy of religion, including what he means by "divine justice." Kant routinely characterizes the Highest Good as an ideal state of affairs in which happiness is distributed in "exact proportion" to our moral worth:[33] and we are, he claims, practically committed to a belief that this distribution will be ultimately realized. This is the basis for his postulation of God and immortality, and as he states in the Preface to *Religion*, it is also what guides its exploration of Christian doctrine. But, the introduction of a "supplement" that goes beyond our own efforts violates the Highest Good's standards for the distribution of happiness; and so, if we follow the "Divine Supplement" interpretation, *Religion* has a serious problem indeed. Its inquiry is supposed to be grounded upon the Highest Good, yet it seems to advance an account of salvation that conflicts with the ground from which that account is derived. So if Kant is to be rescued from these difficulties, we must find a better way to interpret his views on redemption.[34] I believe I have one to offer.

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[31]Quinn, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," 456. See also Mariña, "Kant on Grace: A Reply to his Critics," 392.

[32]Quinn, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," 457. See also: "The debt can literally never be paid in full. . . . But the debt can mercifully be forgiven" (ibid., 452).

[33]In the Canon of the First *Critique*, Kant characterizes the Highest Good in this way roughly a dozen times. For example: A809/B837, A810/B838, A814/B842. Though this distributive formulation of the Highest Good is not as prominent in the Second *Critique*, it can still be found there: 5:110, 5:129, 5:130, 5:144. It is also manifest in Kant's various writings of the 1790s: 5:450, 6:5, 6:68–76, 6:100, 6:143–147, 8:258n, 8:330, 20:298, etc.

[34]In *The Moral Gap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), John Hare is also critical of Kant's view on atonement but for different reasons than Quinn and Wolterstorff. Hare's main concern is that Kant cannot sanction any appeal to divine assistance, given his epistemic strictures. Yet, according to Hare, Kant also does not have a non-theistic solution to the problem of moral transformation (or moral improvement in general); for, according to Hare, our propensity to evil makes such improvement impossible. See pp. 60–65. Consequently, Hare views Kant's project in *Religion* as deeply flawed and in *The Moral Gap*, he moves away from Kant after declaring his project a "Failure" fairly early on in the book. A similar pessimism, though perhaps not quite as strong, can be found in Peter Byrne's *Kant on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See in particular his concluding comments on grace in chapter seven.

In part II of this paper, I have provided some reasons in support of a different, more sympathetic treatment of Kant's account of moral transformation. In my view, Hare to too great an extent downplays our abiding predisposition(s) to the good. He also seems to read Kant's comments regarding the incomprehensibility of moral transformation as if they were claiming the impossibility of our transformation. As this transformation concerns the ultimate subjective ground of our maxims, we reach an explanatory limit, but our failure to conceptualize how this change occurs does not entail that this change is not possible. Moreover, it seems we must accept that the "seed/germ of goodness" has an important role

To begin, let us consider how God assesses our moral character. Many have noted that Kant distinguishes between our perspective on moral transformation, one in which we regard ourselves as "worldly creature[s], nothing more than the continuous becoming of a subject well pleasing to God *in actions*" (6:75n—my emphasis); and the divine perspective, which recognizes the moral status of the *Gesinnung*.[35] When judging the worthiness of the morally transformed "new man," the moral status of his *Gesinnung* "takes *the place of* perfected *action*, since it contains the ground of its own steady progress in remedying its deficiency" (6:75).

God "penetrates to the intelligible ground of the heart" (6:48), sees whether we have given priority to self-interest or morality, and thereby passes judgment upon us. In contrast to those who take God's judgment to be about our "steady progress,"[36] which then requires a "divine supplement," we can see in these passages that it is rather the *ground* of our progress that is judged by God. In other words, in *Religion*, we are not judged based on our conduct, nor upon our striving towards a perfection that we can never realize, but on the fundamental orientation of our will. As Kant puts this point: "in the sight of a divine judge . . . disposition takes the place of the deed" (6:74).

With this understanding of God's assessment of our character, let me finally turn to what happens to the debt of sin. If we consider the moral status of the new man, it should be apparent that he does not have the moral characteristics which burdened the old man with the debt of sin. In "the emergence from the corrupted disposition into the good" (6:74), the new man has reoriented his fundamental incentives in order to give morality priority over self-interest. He now stands in a different relationship with God than did the old man. The reason why the old man bore the debt of sin was because of his choice to prioritize self-interest. As discussed earlier, this choice condones an unlimited neglect of morality, an

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to play in moral transformation. First, because even if there is divine aid, we must become worthy of it (6:44). Presumably this requires something of moral worth on our part. Second, because those in the state of sin can still act from duty. Third, this seed/germ, following the language of the *Second Critique*, still triggers our moral feelings of humility and respect. These may not be sufficient to account for the transformation, but are still relevant and suggestive of a larger picture that Kant, in *Religion*, too perfunctorily claims to be beyond our ability to conceptualize.

[35]Quinn and Wolterstorff discuss it briefly ("Saving Faith from Kant's Remarkable Antinomy," 425; "Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion," 46), though it is more central to Michalson's interpretation.

[36]I suspect that this view (i.e., a "steady progress" to be supplemented by God) is at least partly due to the importation of Kant's discussion of immortality in the *Critique of Practical Reason* into *Religion*. In the former, Kant argues for our immortality on the basis of our need to eternally strive towards moral perfection, but since we cannot achieve perfection, even through eternal striving, God accepts our progress towards it as "equivalent to possession" (5:123n). In footnote 27, I suggested that Wood overlooks the changes to Kant's understanding of moral worth in *Religion*. Also, in "Moral Regeneration and Divine Aid in Kant," Michalson sometimes frames the divine supplement in a manner similar to that of the Second *Critique*: "Divine aid in this sense amounts to something like God's willingness to treat our moral progress as a kind of promissory note" (268).

"infinity of violations of the law." But the new man has restored morality to its proper place. He does not dishonor God. Quite the contrary, he has chosen "good life conduct . . . the true veneration that he [God] desires" (6:105). This makes him "well-pleasing" to God, no longer deserving of punishment (6:73), and following Kant's doctrine of the Highest Good, he is now deserving of happiness in proportion to his moral worth.

I am not here implying that the debt is forgiven. That is, it is not my position that divine grace comes in to play, bringing forgiveness for an existing debt.[37] We looked briefly at the problems that would cause. Nor am I falling back upon the idea of vicarious atonement. No one, neither Christ, nor the new man, pays it back. Nor am I claiming that the death of the old man is payment. That cannot be, for neither is he nor is his death of infinite value.[38] Rather, my position is that since the moral characteristics which put the old man into the state of sin are not present in the new man, the new man does not bear the debt. In the event of moral transformation, the debt just gets wiped off the books, so to speak.

I suspect that many will react to this statement with the thought that it flouts the "satisfaction [which] must be rendered to Supreme Justice," but

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[37]There are passages in *Religion* which some interpreters read this way, but Kant never actually claims that the debt is *forgiven*. When he uses the idea of grace in relation to our debt (vs. help in our moral transformation), there are no passages, at least none that I am aware of, that represent grace as forgiveness. Rather, they refer to God's perspective on our *Gesinnung*. Such a perspective is not an act of forgiveness. As I have argued, it is how God sees the new man, and the new man is without the debt of sin. At 6:76, there is a passage where Kant refers to grace in connection with our being "relieved [*entschlagen*] of all responsibility." But it is meant to express a contrast with the preceding, which refers to our "empirical cognition we have of ourselves" and from this cognition, we "would still be more likely to render a verdict of guilty." Thus, from one perspective, we see ourselves as still guilty; but from the other, divine perspective, we are seen as "relieved" of the liability.

Note as well that Kant's use of *entschlagen* here is relevant. Wood/di Giovanni translate it as "relieved." Other passages translate the verb as "to be rid of" (2:352) or "dismissed" (A653/B681). By contrast, when Kant cites the conventional view of forgiveness, he uses *vergeben* (6:71n, 7:47). See also 4:368, 10:279, 11:532. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, we also find one occasion where he uses *Versöhnlichkeit* (6:461). I will return to the relevance of *entschlagen* below.

[38]Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs in *In Defense of Kant's Religion* suggest that the debt of sin gets discharged through the death of the old man in the moral transformation. Though they move close to my position with the claim that the new man does not bear the debt of sin, a weakness in their interpretation is that through the death of the old man "the infinite dispositional debt is thereby rendered" (176). It seems implausible that the old man's death compensates for the infinite debt. First, this death has something of an abstract status. The death is, of course, neither a corporeal death nor the transfer of a "soul" from this world to the next. Rather, it is the annulment of a feature of a human being which Kant treats as essential to moral identity. As such, why would this annulment be compensatory for an infinite debt? Second, according to Kant, not even actual death is compensatory for the infinite debt. Since sin brings punishment (and the duty to progress morally) in the afterlife, clearly the debt must still abide after one's corporeal death. Nevertheless, despite these objections, I am in agreement with their interpretation of the moral status of the new man as without the debt of sin. See also Jochen Bojanowski, "Zweites Stück: Moralische Vollkommenheit" in Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Bloßen Vernunft*, 91–110. But here too I am concerned that Bojanowski has used something of finite magnitude to pay back something that is infinite. He states: "The new man, as such, deserves no more punishment. By suffering/accepting the pain, he produces that 'excess' which compensates as atonement for the sins of the old man" (ibid., 107).

bear with me. It is not as if the old man has injured God, damaged Him in some way. It is not as if God seeks compensatory damages for a civil tort. In fact, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explicitly rejects this view.[39]

The debt here is, rather, of a different sort. It supervenes on the (mis-) relation between the sinner and God. If I die, having failed to pay back a loan, the creditor may still be compensated through my estate. However, not all debts are so impersonal and not all debts survive one's death. For instance, if I forget my wife's birthday and die before I have a chance to make it up to her, it does not sound right to say that such a debt continues after my death. Debts of such a personal nature, debts having to do with honor, respect, and so forth, more fundamentally depend upon the parties involved and their continuing relationship.

Since the new man does not dishonor God, he does not incur the debt of sin upon himself. However, it may be argued that the old man's debt lingers on within him, and so divine grace is still needed. But this interpretation, I do not think, is one that the text forces upon us; and, as we have seen, it leads Kant into a conflict between the need for a forgiving grace and his views on divine justice. This certainly would have been a very clumsy mistake on Kant's part, especially if in the very pages where he expresses the importance of divine justice, he appeals to grace in such a way that violates this justice.[40] Fortunately, we do not have to shoulder him with such an error.

We do not have to assign to Kant the position that the new man inherits the old man's debt; and, so when Kant speaks of grace in this context, it does not have to be taken as meaning forgiveness. Let me suggest instead that it can be understood epistemically. Here, as elsewhere, when discussing the standpoint of divine justice, Kant makes use of the Leibnizian distinction between nature and grace.[41] From the standpoint of the former,

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[39]See 6:489.

[40]Quinn et al. are correct that forgiveness is incompatible with Kant's conception of divine justice. Kant is quite clear about this point elsewhere. He states that the idea of a generous or merciful judge "in one and the same person is a contradiction." See: 6:141, 6:146n, 19:264, 27:171, 28:338, etc.

[41]For the use closest to what is under discussion, see A812/B840. Kant also uses the nature/grace distinction quite broadly to refer to either an epistemological distinction between our mode of cognition and God's or a metaphysical distinction between the causal order of nature versus supersensible/divine causation. All, of course, reflect different elements within the Leibnizian nature/grace distinction. See also: 6:173–174, 7:24, 7:43, 8:250, 29:629, etc. In Wood's "Kant's History of Ethics," he characterizes the *Groundwork*'s account of our membership in an intelligible world as a further allusion to Leibniz's "realm of grace." Perhaps so, but it is not explicit. That is, Kant does not use "*Reich der Gnade*" or a similar phrase in the third chapter of the *Groundwork*.

There have been various enumerations of different uses of *Gnade* in *Religion*. Byrne, for example, distinguishes between distributive grace, transforming/sanctifying grace, and justifying/atoning grace (*Kant on God*, 140), all of which can be seen as connected to the Leibnizian *Reich der Gnade*. However, my concern in this paper corresponds to Byrne's justifying/atoning grace. In his introduction to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Robert Adams briefly discusses Kant's views on grace and distinguishes between prevenient, sanctifying and justifying grace. According to Adams (and I concur), Kant rejects the

we will see ourselves in a process of becoming. The new man may have given priority to morality over self-interest, but he still must resist inclination and strengthen his moral resolve.[42] He will be sensitive to what tempts him and given the "empirical cognition we have of ourselves . . . the accuser within . . . would still be more likely to render a verdict of guilty" (6:75–76). But from the standpoint of grace, where "disposition takes the place of the deed" (6:74), God judges the *Gesinnung* of the new man. He has successfully reoriented his fundamental incentives, and by virtue of that, will be found "well-pleasing." In this there is no supererogatory forgiveness. Nor is there any need. God sees one's true *Gesinnung* and judges it accordingly.

The opening of Division C of Section One of Book Two of *Religion* mentions three "difficulties" that any theory of redemption must overcome. They have been in the background through much of this paper, especially the first and third "difficulties" (the second concerns the motivational role that a successful theory ought to have).[43] But let me explicitly connect them to what has been discussed thus far.[44]

The first "difficulty" is that works alone cannot overcome the infinite distance from original sin to a condition that is well-pleasing to God (6:66). The third is that we cannot possibly pay back a debt of infinite magnitude (6:72). Kant's answer to both, as I have discussed, comes by way of an epistemological distinction. This is very clear in the case of the first "difficulty":

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first. He also holds that Kant accepts the second and gives "cautious embrace" to the third (see xxi–xxiii).

[42]See for example: 6:64, 6:68–69, 28:1085.

[43]I see Palmquist's "Kant's Ethics of Grace" as focusing on this second "difficulty" and as framing the other two difficulties in relation to it. That is, as this second "difficulty" concerns the practical relevance of a doctrine of grace, Palmquist focuses on the practical implications of the other two as well. He characterizes the first "difficulty" as dealing with the problem of a sustained moral effort for those who have had (or perhaps just think they have had) a change of heart (see ibid., 538); and he at least begins his presentation of the third "difficulty" by discussing the concern that a religious believer may deceive himself about his moral responsibility for his "preconversion life" (ibid., 539).

By contrast, Allen Wood presents the first and third "difficulties" as theoretical concerns (see *Kant's Moral Religion*, 233–235). For instance, Wood portrays the third "difficulty" as the problem of theoretically reconciling divine justice with our becoming justified before God. Wood, however, expresses some confusion about this "difficulty," noting that he would rather have had Kant present the more basic problem of how we may become justified, before linking this to the issue of justice. Wood's intuition here is on target and I think (back in 1969) he was sidetracked by a separate clause and did not catch Kant's actual account of the third "difficulty," which is as follows: "The *third* and apparently the greatest difficulty . . . is as follows. Whatever his state in the acquisition of a good disposition, and, indeed, however steadfastly a human being may have persevered in such a disposition in life conduct conformable to it, *he nevertheless started from evil*, and this is a debt which is impossible for him to wipe out" (6:72). As can be seen in my discussion, I explore this "difficulty" as it is presented in the text: i.e., as a theoretical problem concerning the apparent impossibility of wiping out the debt of sin.

[44]An anonymous reviewer suggested that I make these connections explicit. Hopefully the following paragraphs will help readers better correlate what I have been discussing with the enumerated "difficulties" mentioned in Part II of *Religion*.

> According to our mode of estimation, [to us] who are unavoidably restricted to temporal conditions in our conceptions of the relationship of cause to effect, the deed, as a continuous advance *in infinitum* from a defective good to something better, always remains defective. . . . [But] we can think of the infinite progression of the good towards conformity to the law as being judged by him who scrutinizes the heart (through his pure intellectual intuition) to be a perfected whole." (6:67)

As he puts it a few pages later, "in the sight of a divine judge . . . disposition takes the place of deed" (6:74). Unlike the *Groundwork*'s more episodic evaluation of our actions, and unlike the infinite striving towards perfect virtue discussed in the Second *Critique*'s argument for the immortality of the soul, the position of *Religion* is that God judges us based upon the orientation of our fundamental incentives (i.e., the moral status of our *Gesinnung*). Thus, the first "difficulty" is overcome by rejecting the view that the infinite distance between sin and being well-pleasing to God has to be traversed incrementally. Instead, whether or not we are well-pleasing depends upon the binary "event" of the change of heart.

Kant also presents the third "difficulty" and its solution by distinguishing between our perspective and that of God. Since the debt of sin carries with it an "*infinity* of guilt," we cannot pay it back through any means; and, as we have already discussed, Kant also rejects its transmissibility, thus barring an appeal to vicarious atonement. The remaining option, according to the "Divine Supplement" interpretation, is that God forgives the debt of sin. Yet this putative solution to the third "difficulty," as recognized by Quinn et al., violates Kant's understanding of divine justice.

It seems, then, we are stuck with this debt. From our empirical cognition of ourselves, we "have no rightful claim" (6:75) to redemption. However, when Kant shifts from how the new man sees himself to how God sees him, the new man is described as "relieved [*entschlagen*] of all responsibility . . . though fully in accord with divine justice" (6:76). But, as previously discussed, it is not that the debt is forgiven (for that would violate divine justice). Rather we are "relieved" of it because "of an improved disposition of which, however, God alone has cognition" (6:76).

To be "relieved" (*entschlagen*) of responsibility is different from being forgiven (*vergeben*). When Kant quotes various popular sayings about forgiveness, he uses *vergeben* (e.g., 6:70n, 7:47). But *entschlagen* has a different use. When a judgment is dismissed, or a statute struck down, it is not that the guilty are forgiven—rather, the change in evaluation occurs at a deeper level than with forgiveness. The forgiven are guilty, but treated mercifully. The "relieved" are no longer guilty. Accordingly, because the conditions upon which sin and its debt depend no longer obtain subsequent to the change of heart, the new man is "relieved" of responsibility. To be *entschlagen* likewise can be taken as to be "rid" of or "unbound" from the old man's debt of sin; or, based upon the root morpheme, the "strike" (*der Schlag*) upon him is "un-struck" (*ent-schlagen*).

Nevertheless, the new man will continue to have a moral interest in the old man's corporeal liabilities. From his human perspective, he can only see himself in a process of "continuous becoming" (6:74n) and cannot know whether he has undergone a change of heart. Yet the new man, having undergone this change, will "be more likely to render a verdict of guilty" (6:76); and also, as we shall discuss in the next section, the new man will want to take upon himself the old man's corporeal liabilities. However, Kant explicitly states that the new man does *not* take them on as punishments, but as "so many opportunities to test and exercise his disposition for the good" (6:74n).

Before concluding this section, let me offer one further argument in support of my position that the new man does not inherit the old man's debt of sin. When Kant discusses the change of heart in Part Two of *Religion*, he states that from God's perspective, the new man is "*morally* another being" from the old. In "the emergence from the corrupted disposition into the good" (6:74), Kant states that the old man dies and the new man is a "new creation," a "rebirth," etc. (see 6:47). Similarly, in *The Conflict of the Faculties* Kant describes the moral transformation as "a conversion by which one becomes another, new man" (7:54), and a few lines later, "the end of religious instruction must be to make us *other* human beings and not merely better human beings" (7:54).[45]

The moral status of the old and new man's *Gesinnungen* are fundamentally different and it seems that by virtue of this qualitative difference, in both *Religion* and in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant presents the old man and the new as numerically distinct. Through most of this section, I have argued that the new man, by virtue of his own moral characteristics, would not be burdened by the debt of sin. But if we follow Kant's language here and consider moral transformation as a change in numerical identity, we can again reject the idea that the new man carries the debt of sin through an inheritance from the old, for that would violate Kant's claims concerning transmissibility.[46] It is a debt which "only the culprit, not the innocent, can bear" (6:72).

V. Vicarious Atonement and Corporeal Inheritance

With the rejection of the traditional Christian approach to atonement as well as the idea of the transferability of the debt from the old to the new man, there seems to be no role left for vicarious atonement. Moreover,

[45]Kant also uses this passage to praise Philip Jacob Spener, a founder of Pietism, for having "thrown in the path of the orthodox" (7:54) an account of religious instruction that focuses on inward transformation rather than the inculcation of belief in revelation and the observance of ecclesiastical rituals.

[46]A similar point is made by Hare in *The Moral Gap* (see p. 58). But Hare uses this point to set out a dilemma which leads to "Kant's Failure." However, as I have argued, we do not need the new man to atone for the old man's debt of sin. Thus, the non-transmissibilty of the debt (under the assumption that the two men are numerically distinct) does not generate a problem for Kant. The debt of sin, as I have argued, ceases when the subvening relational structure between the old man and God ceases.

even if one were available, with the old man gone, he could not benefit from it, nor does the new man require such aid, for he is without sin.[47] This seems to leave vicarious atonement as superfluous to Kant's exposition of moral transformation.[48] Nevertheless, I do think it can still have relevance. But rather than to the debt of sin, I shall apply it to the new self's inheritance of the old self's "corporeal" liabilities.

To begin our exploration of this inheritance, let us return to the relationship between the old and new man. The qualitative difference in their *Gesinnungen* makes them, Kant states, numerically distinct moral beings and they would be counted as such from the divine perspective. However, they have the same empirical characteristics: the same body and the same history of behavior. These characteristics are not discussed by Kant to any great extent, but there is an important footnote that delves into the new man's inheritance of the old man's worldly affairs. It speaks of the moral burdens that the old man would experience as punishments, but the new man "willingly takes upon himself, as so many opportunities to test and exercise his disposition for the good" (6:75n).

One thing which we should first be clear about is that the new man cannot know whether he has become a new man, that is, whether he has genuinely restored morality to its rightful priority over self-interest. According to the "empirical cognition we have of ourselves," we cannot know the status of our *Gesinnung*. This is something that only God can see (6:75). Thus, the new man will not slough off the circumstances of the old man. The promises made by the old man, he will see as his own;[49]

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[47]This is a significant point which Philip Quinn appears to overlook in "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification." We cannot, according to Quinn, "wipe out the evils we have done" (457). Though he is correct about this, he does not recognize that moral transformation wipes out the one who has done those evils and thus the new man is righteous in God's eyes. With the two claims I have defended in this paper—(1) that the pivotal moment in moral transformation is within our power; and (2) that through this transformation, the debt of sin of the old man ends with him—Quinn's critique of Kant can be dissolved. In "Saving Faith From Kant's Remarkable Antinomy," Quinn acknowledges Kant's claim that the new self and old man are, morally speaking, distinct beings, but Quinn, as others, assumes that the new man must repay the old man's debt of sin (see 424f). See also Leslie Mulholland, "Freedom and Providence in Kant's Account of Religion: The Problem of Expiation," in Rossi and Wreen, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 77–101.

[48]See also Hare's comments in *The Moral Gap* to the effect that Kant cannot make use of the new man's vicarious substitution (58). As I will argue in this section, there is still a role for vicarious substitution once we distinguish between the fate of our debt of sin and the corporeal inheritance that, in my opinion, is Kant's concern when discussing the new man's adoption of the old man's liabilities.

[49]Whether the new man is bound by promises of the old depends upon how one reads Kant's claim about the new man being "*morally* another being." If one holds that the old and new man are numerically distinct, then presumably promises do not carry through (though the new man may have other reasons to remain committed to them). However, my argument does not need their numerical distinctness. Once there is a *qualitative* change in the subvening relationship, the supervening debt ceases. So, if one wants to claim that the new man and the old man are numerically identical, the old man's promises are still binding for the new man as he is the same agent as the one who made the promise. On the issue of numerical identity, it should be viewed as a coda to my main argument. It offers a supplement and it presumably strengthens my conclusion. However, I am not making a

the thready or broken relationships with friends and family, he will see himself as required to restore; and the history of acquired habits written into the old man's body will have to be erased.

Although it is an extreme case, let us examine the significance of this inheritance through the example of heroin addiction. The old man's addiction has had an array of physiological effects. His body no longer produces a normal amount of natural opioids and their receptors have become desensitized and fewer in number. As a result, the new man will still feel drug cravings, will inherit the indignities of a withered and needle-scored body, a very confused digestive system, perhaps organ damage, hepatitis, or other transmissible diseases. Moreover, the old man has likely also alienated friends and family through neglect if not theft and deception. He has probably a spotty employment history, is likely to be in financial debt, and has opened his life to various nefarious individuals.

The new man's change of heart does not immediately resolve any of this. He will inherit the visceral urge to shoot up and slump back in a warm pool of euphoria, his receptors screaming for their fix, and will be suffering through the agony of withdrawal. He will be embroiled in gruesome circumstances, ranging from parents and siblings who shudder at the thought of his visits, to junkie friends who call him up at all hours hoping to get help finding a fix. He will have credit agencies hounding him, be behind on his rent, etc. All these circumstances are ones that the old man would experience as nuisances, injustices or punishments, but the new man, Kant writes, accepts his inheritance "as so many opportunities to test and exercise his disposition for the good" (6:75n). The new man has before him a long path of physical, interpersonal and financial recovery, and would see the ills of his life as "only a special arrangement *for leading the human being towards happiness*" (28:1080).

Let us now rethink Kant's use of vicarious atonement. First, there is a terminological point. The German is *Stellvertreter*, which can mean proxy, surrogate, or representative. Much of the secondary literature uses "vicarious atonement" but the major English translations use "vicarious substitute." The latter may be somewhat redundant, but it does better suit the German term used as well as Kant's description of the moral relationship between the old and new man.

As I have argued above, the old man's debt of sin died with the old man. But the new man still serves as a proxy, trying to right the wrongs committed by the old man. Though from the divine perspective, the debt of sin is gone, from the phenomenal perspective, there is much the new man takes up on behalf of the old. Some may not agree that this is Kant's intention, but associating the proxy-function of the new man with just the phenomenal

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metaphysical claim here about how to count noumenal objects. We posit the *Gesinnung* on practical grounds and so when Kant says that we regard the new man as "*morally* another being," he is similarly characterizing how we conceptualize the *Gesinnung* for practical purposes.

inheritance has some major interpretative benefits.[50] Since we do not need the new man to pay back the old man's debt of sin, we will have no trouble with Kant's claim that the debt of sin is non-transmissible. Nor will problems linger from Kant's claim that we cannot glean any surplus merit from the deeds of the new man.

The new man does not even know it, for he only sees the phenomenal continuity of a life that has scratched/is scratching its way out of his old habits, but the new man does not deserve the old man's woes. As morally another being, the old man's debts are not his and the new man does not deserve the physical and psychological burdens left to him. Nevertheless, he sees them as opportunities to test his newfound disposition, to strengthen his body, rehabituate his thoughts so that drugs no longer tempt him, strive to restore the old man's broken relationships with friends and family, and make amends for all the ways the old man has harmed others. It is in these ways that the new man can vicariously substitute for the old man. He has stepped into the moral mire of the old man's life and strives to improve all that is left to him.

Conclusion

According to Kant, the debt of sin must somehow be resolved for "satisfaction must be rendered to Supreme Justice." In this paper, we have explored a number of attempts to explain what happens to this debt. As we have seen, the position that I have attributed to Michalson, Quinn and Wolterstorff, the "Divine Supplement" interpretation, requires a form of forgiveness or mercy that stands in tension with Kant's account of divine justice.

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[50]Firestone and Jacobs also suggest that the new man is free of the debt of sin and thus are also left with the question of how to interpret Kant's use of vicarious atonement. They suggest that the new man may deviate from the moral law and incur "finite guilt of particular failings" (*In Defense of Kant's Religion*, 177). They then offer a literal interpretation of vicarious atonement, suggesting that an actual being, the Son of God, "bears the sins of the convert" (ibid., 178). I have a number of concerns with this suggestion. First, if their non-corporeal Son of God still is sacrifice for the debt, then it seems an excessive payment for the "finite guilt of particular failings." Consider the traditional interpretation of Christ's death on the Cross. Would there not seem to be something disproportionate between the sacrifice of the Son of God and the repayment of finite sins? Second, consider Kant's commitment to the afterlife which in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and thereafter includes the possibility of moral progress. Given the centrality of this aspect of Kant's philosophy of religion, why should it not be the means by which we resolve our finite guilt? The need for moral progress in the afterlife presumably applies even to those who have had a change of heart, for that does not entail moral perfection. Further growth will presumably involve various moral challenges. This is implied by various passages in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion.* See 28:1080 and 28:1085. Third, if forgiveness of an infinite debt, something we are incapable of repaying, violates divine justice, then *a fortiori*, a finite debt, something we can repay, must as well. Fourth, their interpretation is also predicated upon a peculiar interpretation of Kant's notion of the "prototype." They discuss a "transcendental Platonism" (157f) where our moral Ideal, the "prototype," is not just a rational Ideal, but "an eternal . . . entity who proceeds from God's own being" (178). They are likely deriving this notion from Kant's string of quotations from the Gospel of John at 6:61, taking them literally and as Kant's actual position. But there is little else available to support this peculiar stance and, as discussed earlier in the paper, a literal reading of Kant's use of John in "The Personified Idea of the Good Principle" seems contrary to what Kant says in the section that follows it.

But as I have argued, Kant does not claim that through grace God forgives us this debt of sin. Although "grace" is used by Kant when discussing what happens to this debt, and it is understandable that many would assume by "grace" that Kant means divine forgiveness, such an assumption neglects the epistemic language used in the salient passages of *Religion* as well as Kant's various allusions to the Leibnizian nature/grace distinction when discussing the divine perspective.

Following this epistemic interpretation, God does not deviate from the demands of justice (or the Highest Good) by treating the new man in a way that he does not deserve. In fact, no such deviation is needed. The moral characteristics that put the old man in a state of sin are not present in the new man and it is not extra-judicial or supererogatory for God to see the new man as he truly is, to see "the intelligible ground of the heart" (6:48).[51]

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